

## EPISTEMIC PROBLEMS WITH HICK'S DIVERSITY MODEL

Domenic Marbaniang

Hick's arguments for diverse, and often contradictory, religious responses to "Ultimate Reality" have been the subject of almost every discussion in the theology of religions. His own Copernican Revolution model based on Kant's Copernican Revolution model has been variously analyzed by leading philosophers of the day. One of the best critiques made was by George I Mavrodes in John Hick's *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (2001). A paraphrasal gist of the whole argument can be summed up as follows (with additional comments):

1. Is the *noumena* of Hick plural or singular? In other words, is Hick a polytheist or monotheist? Hick calls the *noumena* as ineffable? However, he seems to be preferring the singular over the plural, though he admits that even the concept of the "one" (number) is phenomenal and so can't be applied to the *noumena*.
2. How can a neither-not, unrelated, amoral, ineffable, and unconcerned *noumena* account for religious ideals such as love, goodness, kindness, and care?
3. If the *phenomenal* is the final product of the human mind, in all its diversity, then how does that rule out the possibility that that mind was created by the *noumenal* in order to know both the *phenomenal* and the *noumenal*?
4. There is a possibility that a non-Hickian philosopher who doesn't believe that a connection exists between the Real and religious phenomena would postulate something else to account for such phenomena. He would postulate the Unreal, and it would look as much ineffable and attribute-less like Hick's Real.

Hick responds by admitting the inadequacy of language and the misleading potentiality of talking about the Real in plural terms. That, of course, doesn't seem to solve the problem of genuine moral experience and the many contradictorily diverse interpretations of "God".

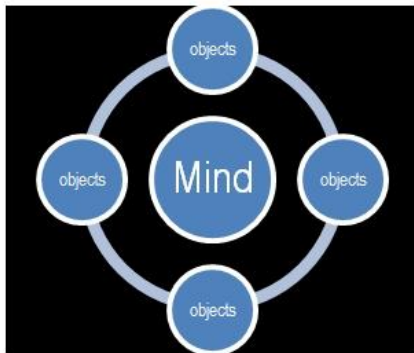


Fig. 1 Kant's Copernican Revolution

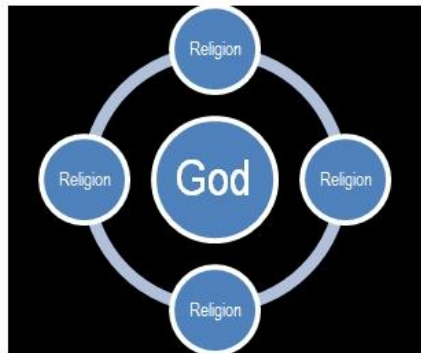
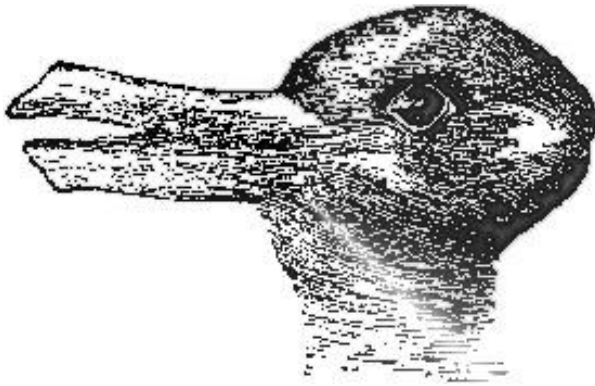


Fig 2. Hick's Copernican Revolution

While one can be sympathetic with Hick's quest for unity in diversity, for peace and harmony, one must be careful with his interpretation of a theory that he avouches as his starting point towards this end. Kant's *phenomenalism* would never say that the same reality (*noumenon*) would appear (*phenomenon*) to be one to few and many to others (for instance, if I see a cup of coffee on my desk, I would assume that it wouldn't appear as two cups of coffee to a number of others; at least, I would assume that even though it did appear to be two due to some particular eye-malady, the subjects would soon discover the error of their vision when they extend their hand to drink from the cup). There is certain absoluteness to even *phenomenal* truth, since the *a priori* categories of Kant's pure reason involve necessity and universality in application. There can be plurality of things but not plurality of truths, and religious truth can't admit an excuse, given even the *noumena/phenomena* distinction. Hick's interpretation would certainly be disapproved by Kant.

Now, Hick employs another model to explain the diversity. He calls it "experience-as", which is his adaptation of Wittgenstein's "seeing-as" which may be summed up in the epigram "You see it as you interpret it". For instance, in the following duck/rabbit picture by Jastrow, one can either see a duck or a rabbit in it.



The postulate would be that Reality is ambiguous, and therefore open to contradictory interpretations. That might, perhaps, solve the problem of religious diversity to an extent. However, it would also demolish all absolute claims to genuine religious experience. One can't just hold on to his own interpretation of the Real as true; but, must admit other interpretations as equally valid. This becomes normative in a way. One would ask, "Can the Real be experienced as Good by some and Evil by others?" Hick has indicated in his dialogue with Alister McGrath in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (by Okholm & Phillips, 1995) that his theory is mainly concerned with "the great world religions", and so references to Satanism, Rastafarianism, and such could be immediately taken out. It certainly seems evident that Hick's concept of objective ambiguity is governed by the criteria of objective morality. Thus, Kant's influence has a thorough effect (cf. *The Critique of Practical Reason*). Whatever the *noumenal* is in itself, the *phenomenal* cannot be immoral, though "it" be amorally construed.

Unity and morality are his guiding lights. A Christian will know where these lights, if rightly followed, would lead.